

HITCHING POST HILL
3308 Rosemary Lane
Hyattsville
Prince George's County
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-976

HABS
MD
17-HYATV,
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS AND
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HITCHING POST HILL

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- Location: 3308 Rosemary Lane, Hyattsville, Prince George's County, Maryland
- Present Owner: John and Kathy Giannetti (also present occupant)
- Present Use: Private residence
- Significance: Hitching Post Hill, built ca. 1840, is a good example of Greek Revival architecture, a style not commonly found in Prince George's County. The property was purchased in 1875 by General Edward F. Beale of Decatur House in Washington, D.C., best known as the Surveyor General and pathfinder of California and Nevada during the days of the pioneer. Beale--who purchased Hitching Post Hill as a country home and horse farm--entertained U.S. Presidents Ulysses S. Grant and Grover Cleveland here.
- Description: This is a two-story, square, five-bay-by-two-bay brick structure on a high basement, with a low-hipped roof, topped by a cupola with an overhanging boxed cornice supported by brackets. The south front entry is in the center of the facade and has a full frontispiece with side, corner and transom lights. The windows of the first floor of the south front are floor-to-ceiling, six-over-nine-light-sash, with thin muntins. Elsewhere, the windows are six-over-six-light-sash. The windows have flat-arched brick lintels and louvered shutters. A broad porch, supported by Doric columns with a plain balustrade, runs the length of the south front and the east and west sides of the house. There is also an entry to the center of the north rear, with a portico entryway. From here, the high basement with six-over-six-light-sash windows is easily visible. There are interior brick chimneys, two each at the east and west side elevations. There is a boxed cornice with dentil molding across a plain, wide frieze.
- History: The house, originally known as "Ash Hill," was built by Englishman Robert Clark ca. 1840 on a tract of 427-1/2 acres. It was purchased in 1875 by General Edward Fitzgerald Beale of Decatur House in Washington, D.C., as his country home and horse farm. General Beale was a naval officer, surveyor, government agent and pathfinder of the American west. Beale, a native of Washington, D.C., pursued a naval career--as his father and grandfather had before him. He entered the Naval School in Philadelphia in 1839 at the age of seventeen. His first commission upon graduation in 1842 led him aboard the frigate "Congress," which carried him to California. He would remain in this region for many years. Beale then served in the War with Mexico, during which time he was decorated for gallant conduct during the Battle of San Pasqual. He was later selected to carry dispatches to Washington, D.C., reporting on the happenings in California. Among his dispatches was the first official news of gold discoveries, with a sample bag of gold. Beale made six overland trips from California to Washington in two years.

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In 1848 he married Mary Edwards, resigned from the Navy and settled in California. He began a transport company, carrying equipment to the gold miners. Beale served as the first Superintendent of Indian Affairs in California and Nevada, which included surveying lands for reservations, from 1852 to 1856. He later was appointed by President James Buchanan as Superintendent of the Wagon Road Expedition from Fort Defiance in the old territory of New Mexico to the Colorado River on the California border. Beale's wagon roads were among the first in the 1850s, and Army posts were then established along them. This position lead to an appointment from president Lincoln as Surveyor General of California and Nevada.

Edward Beale returned to Washington, D.C., with his wife and family in 1876 to accept an appointment, offered by President Grant, as U.S. Minister to Austria-Hungary. Beale, however, served only one year in this position. He purchased the Decatur House, on Lafayette Square, where he would spend his remaining days. Beale also purchased Hitching Post Hill, or "Ash Land," as it was then known, as a horse farm. President Grant, a personal friend of Edward Beale, was often a guest at Hitching Post Hill where they shared in the raising of trotting horses. President Grover Cleveland and Buffalo Bill Cody were also said to have been among those entertained at Hitching Post Hill. Edward Beale died at Decatur House on April 22, 1893.

Hitching Post Hill was purchased by Admiral Chauncey Thomas in 1895. Thomas is attributed with the addition of the porch that surrounds the house on three sides. Perhaps he was also responsible for the cupola and the marble mantels and other Victorian-era decorative details which grace the home's interior. Hitching Post Hill is now the home of John and Kathy Giannetti and their family. John Giannetti--who operates an ornamental plasterwork studio--has added his own decorative plasterwork to the house.

Sources:

Burch, Jane Augusta. "The Last Path-finding Pioneer," (unpublished biography of General Edward T. Beale).

Burch, T. Raymond and Christopher Owens. National Register of Historic Places Inventory--Nomination Form, Ash Land or Hitching Post Hill, prepared July 1975.

Virta, Alan. Prince George's County, A Pictorial History. Norfolk, Va.: The Donning Publishing Company, 1984.

Historian:

Catherine C. Lavoie, HABS, February 1992.